



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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Contact: Jerry Buendel (360) 902-1856
Mike Louisell (360) 902-1813

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560

Visit our Web site at: agr.wa.gov

Don't get soaked buying firewood, ask for receipt

OLYMPIA – The cool fall weather is prompting Washington residents to buy firewood for the approaching winter. The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) advises consumers to take steps to make sure a bad deal doesn't leave your wood piles and wallets short.

The Weights and Measures program at WSDA, which investigates consumer problems with firewood purchases, has received 31 complaints in the past 12 months. Most of the complaints are from Pierce County.

"The majority of wood sellers play by the rules, but there are some who take advantage of the unsuspecting," said Jerry Buendel, Weights and Measures program manager. "You should handle firewood purchases with the same caution as you would any other business transaction."

People complain about getting less wood than they paid for or because they are not satisfied with the quality of the firewood. If there is a problem, contact the seller before burning any wood. For assistance, call WSDA at (360) 902-1857.

For best results, be present for the delivery and take time to inspect the firewood before it's unloaded. "If you're not satisfied, refuse the load or negotiate a new price," Buendel adds. "You should also ask for a receipt." Washington law requires wood sellers to provide a receipt that shows the name and address of both the buyer and the seller and the date delivered. The invoice should also state the price, the quantity delivered, the quantity upon which the price is based, and the type and quality of the wood. If the vendor refuses to give you a receipt at the time of delivery, it could be a signal that you are about to be ripped off.

The legal measure for firewood in Washington is the cord or a fraction of a cord. Sellers often deceive buyers with terms such as unit, truckload, face cord, rick or pile. These terms have no legal definition and cannot, therefore, be used as a measure for the amount of firewood being sold. Consumers also should be aware there aren't legal definitions for terms such as seasoned, dry or cured firewood.

A cord is 128 cubic feet. To be sure you have a cord, stack the wood neatly by placing the wood in a line or a row, with individual pieces touching and parallel to each other. Make sure the wood is compact and has as few gaps as possible. Finally, measure the stack. If the width times the height times the length equals 128 cubic feet, you have a cord of firewood. While wood stacked in a crisscross or log cabin fashion is secure and will stand freely, it does not meet the legal definition. Most likely the stack will contain less wood than one that is stacked by the legal method.

Weights and Measures inspectors make an effort to have the wood seller make up the shortage. But in chronic cases, the agency works with county prosecutors to bring criminal charges against offenders.

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